

REMARKS

In view of the above amendments and following remarks, reconsideration and further examination are requested.

In an Office Action mailed June 26, 2006, Applicants were informed that the Amendment filed May 8, 2006, was non-responsive. In order to discuss the Examiner's determination that the May 8th Amendment was non-responsive, a telephonic interview was conducted with Examiner Wilkins. The courtesies extended by Examiner Wilkins in discussing this matter are greatly appreciated. During the phone conversation, Examiner Wilkins indicated that a responsive Amendment would amend claim 2 to include the "concentration analyzing device" of claim 2 and the "plating solution preparing device" of claim 5.

Accordingly, by the current Amendment: claim 2 has been amended to include the "concentration analyzing device" of claim 3 and the "plating solution preparing device" of claim 5; claims 3, 5, 7, 10, 14 and 15 have been canceled; and claims 22-26 have been added.

Claim 1 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Oka et al., and claim 1 was rejected under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting as being unpatentable over claims 1, 2, 3 and 6 of U.S. Patent No. 6,294,059, as well as over claims 1-3 of U.S. Patent No. 6,929,722.

These rejections are not believed to be applicable with regard to the currently presented claims for the following reasons.

Claim 2 recites:

A substrate plating apparatus for electrolessly plating a surface of a semiconductor substrate with metal, said apparatus comprising:

a plating area including at least one plating chamber for containing a plating solution for electrolessly plating a semiconductor substrate with metal;

a cleaning and drying area including at least one cleaning unit comprising a cleaner with a sponge layer for cleaning a plated semiconductor substrate;

a partition disposed between said plating area and said cleaning and drying area;

a concentration analyzing device...and

a plating solution preparing device...
wherein pressure in said cleaning and drying area is greater
than pressure in said plating area.

The invention as now recited in claim 2 has associated therewith advantages based on the following.

Generally, electroless plating is performed in a plating area using a high-temperature plating solution having a temperature of about 80°C, and therefore, a considerable amount of steam is generated in the plating area. This steam may enter an adjacent cleaning and drying area and thereby exert an adverse effect on a plated substrate. The apparatus as recited in claim 2 prevents such steam from entering the cleaning and drying area due to the pressure in the cleaning and drying area being greater than pressure in the plating area.

Additionally, even if particles or the like adhere to the substrate, the cleaner, in the cleaning a drying area, having the sponge layer can remove such particles from the substrate, thereby resulting in a lowered defective rate. Please see paragraph [0067] of the specification for support for the cleaner as now claimed.

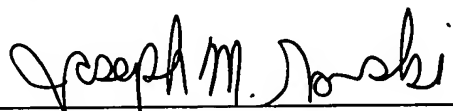
The apparatus as recited in claim 2 is not taught or suggested by Oka et al., and accordingly, claim 2 is allowable over Oka et al. Also, claim 2 is believed to be patentably distinct from the claims of U.S. Patent No. 6,294,059 and 6,929,722 because the cleaner having a sponge layer as required by claim 2 is lacking from the claims of the aforementioned two patents, whereby it is respectfully submitted that the obviousness-type double patenting rejections are not applicable.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in condition for allowance, with the allowed claims being 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11-13, and 16-26, and an early Notice of Allowance is earnestly solicited.

If after reviewing this Amendment, the Examiner believes that any issues remain which must be resolved before the application can be passed to issue, the Examiner is invited to contact the Applicants' undersigned representative by telephone to resolve such issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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